

Front Page News **Hearst starts the Spanish-American War**

William Randolph Hearst needed a good story. The newspaper tycoon published the popular *New York Journal*, along with over twenty other periodicals throughout the nation at the turn of the 20th century. With so much control over the media, Hearst certainly had the ability to sway public opinion.

Much to his dismay, however, William Randolph Hearst wasn't alone. While he controlled a large handful of newspapers, he didn't control them all. To offset this unfortunate fact, he had to be certain that his news was the most interesting to read – the truth sometimes had to take a second priority.

In the 1890's, Hearst found himself in a newspaper war with Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*. Both publishers publicly prided themselves on uncovering the injustices in the world, and their stories were enough to keep any reader occupied. Even in the rare instances where there was no exciting news to report, both Hearst and Pulitzer found a way to fill the front page.

The *Journal* and the *World* began to report about the Cuban battle for independence from Spain in the late 1890's. This story seemed to get a reaction, so the newspapers continued to follow the Cuban plight. Hearst stirred up public sentiment by publishing anti-American letters from Spanish leaders, and sometimes exaggerating their heavy-handed rule over the Cubans.

To follow the story more closely, William Randolph Hearst sent a photographer, Frederic Remington, to take pictures of the Cuban uprising. Because of the dramatic articles featured in the newspaper, Remington expected to be in exciting territory. Instead, he arrived in Cuba to find that nothing was happening at all. Disappointed, he asked Hearst if he could return.

Upon hearing Remington's request to return due to a lack of action in Cuba, Hearst makes a decision. He reassures Remington by saying, ***"You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war."***

Hearst made good on his promise to Remington. On February 15, 1898, a mysterious explosion sank the *U.S.S. MAINE*, a battleship patrolling the coast of Cuba. It was just the break that William Randolph Hearst was looking for. Immediately, Hearst published the tragedy throughout his newspapers, and coverage on the Cuban uprising was constant. Competing papers, such as those owned by Pulitzer, got into the act as well. It soon seemed that each paper was trying to outdo the other, reporting more sensational news concerning the terrible acts of the Spaniards in Cuba.

Perhaps the American public didn't believe everything that they read in the papers. Still, if even half of it was true, then it was reason enough to declare war on Spain. President McKinley at first believed that a diplomatic course of action would be best, but the sentiment for war was growing quickly throughout the nation.

Finally, President McKinley acknowledged that the situation had to be dealt with – immediately. The Spanish-American War was under way. There were a few quick naval battles that ended in the destruction of the Spanish fleet, and nearly 20,000 American troops rushed in to capture Santiago. For the most part, however, the war was completely one-sided, and the Americans succeeded in liberating Cuba from Spain. More importantly, Hearst got his story.